

Pentagon Papers: The Sec

To see the conflict and our part in it as a tragedy without villains, war crimes without criminals, lies without liars, espouses and promulgates a view of process, roles and motives that is not only grossly mistaken but which underwrites deceptions that have served a succession of Presidents.

—Daniel Ellsberg

THE issues were momentous, the situation unprecedented. The most massive leak of secret documents in U.S. history had suddenly exposed the sensitive inner processes whereby the Johnson Administration had abruptly escalated the nation's most unpopular—and unsuccessful—war. The Nixon Government, battling stubbornly to withdraw from that war at its own deliberate pace, took the historic step of seeking to suppress articles before publication, and threatened criminal action against

that the Government was fighting so fiercely to protect. Those records afforded a rare insight into how high officials make decisions affecting the lives of millions as well as the fate of nations. The view, however constricted or incomplete, was deeply disconcerting. The records revealed a dismaying degree of miscalculation, bureaucratic arrogance and deception. The revelations severely damaged the reputations of some officials, enhanced those of a few, and so angered Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield—a long-patient Democrat whose own party was hurt most—that he promised to conduct a Senate investigation of Government decision making.

The sensational affair began quietly with the dull thud of the 486-page Sunday New York Times arriving on doorsteps and in newsrooms. A dry Page One headline—VIETNAM ARCHIVE: PEN-

John Mitchell charged that the Times's disclosures would cause "irreparable injury to the defense of the United States" and obtained a temporary restraining order to stop the series after three installments, worldwide attention was inevitably assured.

A Study Ignored

The Times had obviously turned up a big story (see PRESS). Daniel Ellsberg, a former Pentagon analyst and superhawk-turned-superdove, apparently had felt so concerned about his involvement in the Viet Nam tragedy that he had somehow conveyed about 40 volumes of an extraordinary Pentagon history of the war to the newspaper. Included were 4,000 pages of documents, 3,000 pages of analysis and 2.5 million words—all classified as secret, top secret or top secret-sensitive.

The study was begun in 1967 by Sec-



JULY 1965: JOHNSON DISCUSSING VIET NAM POLICY BEFORE TELEVISION SPEECH

Always the secret option, another notch, but never victory.

the nation's most eminent newspaper.

The dramatic collision between the Nixon Administration and first the New York Times, then the Washington Post, raised in a new and spectacular form the unresolved constitutional questions about the Government's right to keep its planning papers secret and the conflicting right of a free press to inform the public how its Government has functioned—(see story page 2). Yet, even more fundamental, the legal battle focused national attention on the records

TAGON STUDY TRACES 3 DECADES OF GROWING U.S. INVOLVEMENT—was followed by six pages of deliberately low-key prose and column after gray column of official cables, memorandums and position papers. The mass of material seemed to repel readers and even other newsmen. Nearly a day went by before the networks and wire services took action—was to refrain from comment so as not to give the series any greater "exposure." But when Attorney General

retary of Defense Robert McNamara, who had become disillusioned by the futility of the war and wanted future historians to be able to determine what had gone wrong. For more than a year, 35 researchers, including Ellsberg, Rand Corporation experts, civilians and uniformed Pentagon personnel, worked out of an office adjoining McNamara's. With Pentagon documents dating back to arguments within the Truman Administration on whether the U.S. should help